



**Charleston County School District**  
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# Media Release

## **National Principals Appreciation Month - De Jong helps students recover and rebound towards a path to success**

**Charleston, SC (October 1, 2025)** - [Principal Michael De Jong](#) and his staff are literally turning things around for students who attend Turning Point Academy, a Charleston County School District (CCSD) alternative program for students with behavioral and academic challenges. They are fully committed to helping students get back on track, reminding them that their mistakes and choices don't have to define them.

Students who come to Turning Point range from straight 'A' students who made a poor choice to students who struggle with social and emotional obstacles.

"Our job is to show them we care about them and we are here to provide them with substance, academic, emotional, and mental support," explained De Jong. "We see growth in these students during their time with us, and we build on that with assistance from the students' home schools so that they can go back and thrive."

Education is De Jong's second career. He initially worked in hospitality and tourism, owning several of his own companies. It allowed him plenty of free time to volunteer in his children's schools, getting to know the staff very well. One day, a teacher named Kim Jackson (now the principal at Mount Pleasant Academy) suggested that he pursue a career in education. The next day, a national advertisement came on television promoting a program for professionals like De Jong to earn their teaching certificate.

"In my mind, it was meant to be," said De Jong. "It is by far the most rewarding thing I have ever done."

This is De Jong's seventeenth year in education. He started at Daniel Jenkins, teaching science, and moved to Garrett Academy the following year, where he began serving as the athletic director while teaching chemistry. It was a perfect fit for someone who has always held leadership roles. While teaching, he earned his administrative degree and was chosen to serve as assistant principal at Baptist Hill. When asked to serve at Turning Point, he jumped at the chance, knowing the program was something he could build into what he thought it should be, with guidance from the district.

"It's a unique program, and it works," said De Jong. "Students and families know the prerequisites that they must meet, and they also know that we are right alongside them, building them up and making them better people. The staff here give of themselves beyond measure, and often is the case, neither student nor staff wants to leave the program."

Victoria Douglas, a middle school teacher in the program, said De Jong's approachable and friendly demeanor sets the tone for the atmosphere at Turning Point.

"The comfortable atmosphere he has created is exactly what this unique environment needs," said Douglas. "It enables us to build relationships with each other and our students. Relationships are critical in this environment. The students who come to us come from across the district and for a variety of reasons. They need to know that they are safe here."

Turning Point has the highest scores in the district for culture and environment. That makes Lead Teacher Jennifer Croucher proud.

"He is the vision of what we do here," said Croucher. "Mr. De Jong is the definition of a servant leader. There are, of course, non-negotiables, but we as a staff are all involved in all of the decisions, and that makes all the difference in the world. That leads to honesty and transparency."

For many of the students who arrive at Turning Point, it is the first time they have ever received necessary support in their lives, De Jong explained.

"The support starts the minute a student arrives at Turning Point," said De Jong. "We begin to establish a trusting relationship right away. We make ourselves available around the clock. It takes a special person to understand the unique needs of our students, and that is why we are all here."

Douglas said that De Jong embodies everything that Turning Point is.

"He makes teachers and staff feel like this is where we belong," said Douglas. "He makes sure there are a lot of celebrations, so that everyone feels a sense of accomplishment. He often jokes with the students so they know he is approachable. It's a very welcoming atmosphere, thanks to Principal De Jong."

Princess Deas, a junior in high school, said she knows De Jong is there for her should she need him.

"He sets boundaries and high expectations for us, but he is sweet and genuine," said Deas. "He wants us to succeed. Most importantly, he does not focus on our mistakes. He looks forward to our futures. He sees us as humans, not delinquents. He makes me feel normal and that my mistake does not define me."

Parents are required to be part of the restoration process. In some cases, the process retrains the parent. To do that, the staff provides parents with consistent positive feedback about their student via in-person, personal phone calls, and emails, and they hear from Principal DeJong himself weekly.

The most rewarding part of the work is when a student finally cracks that first smile, De Jong said. He said it may take a few days or a week for the student to understand the climate and culture, but once they do, students settle in and know they belong.

"I have always been one to say I work for the school, the students, and the staff," said De Jong. I consider myself the support staff. Anyone can come to me for any reason. I will always support the betterment of the school and our students."

Deas said she knows Principal De Jong loves her.

"From all the support to all of the early morning jokes, I know that Mr. De Jong is working hard to help us recover and rebound," said Deas.

Croucher said that Turning Point can deliver because De Jong models and embodies the vision.

"He truly believes in his heart that it is his job to make our job easier," explained Croucher.

De Jong's passion for serving students is evident in all he does.

"This role is so rewarding," said De Jong. "There are days when it is difficult, but I never want to leave to do anything else. I just don't want to give it up. I enjoy doing for others. That is my reward. We get to send them back to their homeschools a better person."

For more information, contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.